

INFLUENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON CAREER DECISION

MAKING OF UNDERGRADUATE EMERGING ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Career explorations and decisions are important aspects of emerging adulthood as the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater in this stage than it will be at any other period of the life course. Thus, this study was taken up to know the influence of socioeconomic status on career decision making difficulties of undergraduate emerging adults in India. Emerging adults in undergraduate courses from Dharwad, Karnataka, India constituted the population for the study. The sample for the study comprised of 670 students who were randomly selected from eleven colleges. Career Decision-making Difficulty Questionnaire by Gati et al., (1996) was used to assess lack of readiness, lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making difficulty. Socioeconomic Status Scale by Aggarwal et al., (2005) was used to assess the socio economic status. The results revealed significant associations between the levels of socioeconomic status with lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making. There were also significant negative correlations observed with all the categories of career decision making difficulty as well as with total career decision making difficulty. A significant difference of mean was also observed between the levels of socioeconomic status with lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making where the lower middle socioeconomic status scored the highest. This calls for the importance of professionals and teachers to be more vigilant and attentive in guiding the students particularly those from lower socioeconomic status so that they can make appropriate career decisions with ease despite their vulnerability.

KEY WORDS: *Emerging Adults, Career Decision Making And Socioeconomic Status*

Received: Aug 08, 2017; **Accepted:** Aug 28, 2017; **Published:** Sep 23, 2017; **Paper Id.:** IJESROCT20179

INTRODUCTION

The process of becoming an adult is more gradual and varied today than it was half a century ago. Continuing changes in the social structure of modern societies have postponed the entry to adulthood and the undertaking of adult responsibilities well beyond the teenage years. This further delay of the transition to adulthood has led to the recognition of a life stage separate from adolescence and preceding young adulthood. This extended adolescence has been transformed, in the words of Jeffrey Arnett (2000), into “a distinct new period of life that will be around for many generations to come” which has been termed as emerging adulthood. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions.

The demand for education and training has increased relentlessly over the past decades. As the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater in this stage than it will be at any other period of the life course, career explorations and decisions are important aspects of emerging adulthood. Career decision-making can

be defined as a process that describes or explains the choices that a person makes when selecting a particular career. Gati emphasized that, the career decision-making process has the same characteristics, as any other decision-making process, which means that the process involves an individual who chooses what he/she feels is the most appropriate from various career possibilities based on comparison and evaluation of alternatives, mindful of the fact that these comparison and evaluation processes are influenced both by the characteristics of the educational program/ profession and the individual. The ability to make good career decisions has become increasingly important because of different work practices worldwide as a result of rapid globalization and technological advances. With increased choice of courses at university and more opportunities and options to pursue tertiary education and in addition to expanding work opportunities globally, the career decision-making process has become more complex and as such more challenging and difficulties in career decision making are likely to arise. Mau (2001) stated that difficulties in career decision making may occur when individuals do not have adequate information, have inconsistent information or have a lack of knowledge on how to process information to make a decision. Thus, studying career decision making will help to identify different factors involved in a person's career decision-making and will provide an understanding of the way the factors impact the career decisions and choices.

Research from different cultural contexts including the Indian environment has revealed relationships between socio-economic status (SES) and different career related aspects such as career belief, career aspiration, career preferences etc. Investigation on career belief showed a significant socio-economic status difference, with the lower SES groups showing higher levels of negative career beliefs (Arulmaniet *al.*, 2001). Some researches (Mau and Bikos 2000) suggest that, both parent education and income influence career aspirations. A research in India has shown the career preferences of middle class high school students, who are restricted to a handful of three to four careers, which they, their families and communities firmly, believe are good careers (Arulmaniet *al.*, 2001). Several studies found that, parental social class, parental aspiration and parent's educational level were all predictive of student's aspiration as well as their educational and occupational attainment (Garg, *et al.*, 2002). However, there is dearth of research regarding SES and career decision making difficulties. Given that Indian society is characterized by many layers of socio-economic status, differences may probably exist between the different SES with regard to the career decision making. Thus, this study was taken up to know the influence of SES on career decision making difficulties of undergraduate emerging adults.

METHODS

The target population of the study was undergraduate students from different streams of studies in Dharwad taluk, Karnataka, India. A total of 11 colleges were selected comprising of eight general colleges (three arts colleges, three commerce colleges, two science colleges) and three professional college viz. medical, engineering and agricultural colleges. From the three years general degree colleges, samples were drawn from 1st year to 3rd year undergraduates while from the professional colleges, samples were drawn from 1st year to 4th/5th year undergraduates depending on the number of years of graduation degree course. A random sample of 15 to 20 per cent were drawn from each class summing up to a total of 148 for commerce, 167 for arts, 106 for science, 76 for medical, 65 for engineering and 108 from agricultural university with an overall sample of 670 undergraduates. The age ranges of the samples were from 18 years to 26 years with 45.6 per cent males (304) and 54.4 per cent females (366).

Career decision making difficulty questionnaire by Gati *et al.*, (1996: updated in 2011) was used to assess lack of readiness (10 items), lack of information (12 items), inconsistent information (10 items) and the overall career decision making difficulty. It is a 9-point Likert-type response format ranging from does not describe me (1) to describe me well (9)

where two items are for validity check. The mean of each career decision making difficulty category are computed and classified into negligible (<3.33), moderate (3.34- 6.34) and salient (> 6.34). To assess the socio economic status, a 22 statement socio-economic status scale by Aggarwal *et al.*, (2005) was used. The total is computed and can be classified into six categories where scores >76 are in upper high category, 61-75 in high category, 46-60 in upper middle, 31-45 in lower middle, 16-30 in poor and < 15 in very poor category. The study samples were observed in five categories of the socio-economic status namely; poor SES (1.0%), lower middle SES (25.8%), upper middle SES (48.4%), high SES (21.6%) and upper high SES (3.1%). Since, very less percentages were from upper high and poor SES, the lower middle category and poor category were clubbed together as lower middle and high category and upper high category were clubbed together as high category. Thus, only three categories viz. lower middle category, upper middle category and high category were considered for chi square and F test analysis.

RESULTS

A perusal of table 1 shows the association as well as the correlation between socio economic status and the categories of career decision making difficulty. With regard to the association between the levels of SES with the categories of career decision making difficulty, there was a significant association between the levels of SES with lack of information ($\chi^2 = 16.56$, $p \leq 0.01$) and inconsistent information ($\chi^2 = 20.97$, $p \leq 0.001$) and total career decision making difficulty ($\chi^2 = 16.43$, $p \leq 0.01$). There were lower percentages of lower middle SES (22.2 %, 19.4 % and 15.0%) and higher percentage of high SES (39.8 %, 41.0% and 28.3%) in negligent category for lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making difficulty. While, a higher percentage of lower middle SES (23.9 %, 22.2% and 22.2 %) and lower percentages of high SES (13.3 %, 13.9 % and 12.7 %) were observed in the salient category lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making difficulty. However, with regard to lack of readiness and socio economic status, there was no significant association ($\chi^2 = 4.04$). Regarding the correlation between socio economic status and categories of career decision making difficulty, there was a significant negative correlation between SES with all the categories of career decision making difficulty viz. lack of readiness ($r = -0.08$, $p \leq 0.01$), lack of information ($r = -0.17$, $p \leq 0.01$), inconsistent information ($r = -0.16$, $p \leq 0.01$) as well as with the total career decision making difficulty ($r = -0.17$, $p \leq 0.01$). This indicates that with increase in SES, career decision making difficulties decreases.

The comparison of mean scores of the categories of career decision making difficulty by levels of SES is depicted in table 2. There was a significant mean difference for both lack of information ($F = 10.92$, $p \leq 0.01$) and inconsistent information ($F = 9.65$, $p \leq 0.01$) where the mean score for lower middle SES was highest (4.98, 4.91) followed by upper middle SES (4.49, 4.48) and lowest mean score was observed for high SES (3.99, 3.98). The post hoc Duncan analysis revealed that the mean scores differ significantly from each other. Similarly, the comparison of mean for total career decision making difficulty was also significant ($F = 10.78$, $p \leq 0.01$) where the post hoc Duncan analysis revealed that the mean of lower middle SES (5.50), upper middle SES (4.76) and high SES (4.33) differ significantly from each other. There was no significant difference of means ($F = 2.78$) between the levels of SES with regard to lack of readiness category.

DISCUSSIONS

The career decision making difficulty was studied under three sub categories along with total career decision making difficulty. The sub categories studied were lack of readiness, lack of information and inconsistent information. The

result showed a significant association between the levels of SES with lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making. There was also a significant negative correlation observed with all the categories of career decision making difficulty. A significant difference of mean was also observed between the levels of SES with lack of information, inconsistent information and total career decision making where lower middle SES scored the highest. SES typically includes quantification of family income, parental education, occupational status, family possession along with the social status of the family. Individuals from different SES differ in the information that they receive about career as well as in the way they take decision about their career because the opportunities and the exposure that an individual receive are in based on SES to a great extent. Lack of readiness is characterized by lack of motivation to engage in career decision making and a general indecisiveness concerning all types of career decision making and dysfunctional beliefs about career decision making (Kelly and Lee, 2002). The negative correlation observed between lack of readiness and SES may probably be because of the disparities in economic and social resources between the different SES groups. Those with high SES will have more resources and as such, when they take decisions about their career, they are likely to be ready in taking their decision as they are not hindered by financial constraints and they are likely to have more social contacts to carry out their career plans. On the other hand, those in lower SES are likely to go through a more elaborated career decision processes and hence may be less ready as their career decisions may be hindered by financial constraints.

Similarly, lack of information, described as a lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the career decision making process as well as a lack of information about self and various occupations and lack of information about ways of obtaining additional information are likely to be effected by SES. In addition, inconsistent information indicates that there are contradictions in the information that an individual have about himself and about the occupations where a high score in this category indicates a gap between an individual's preferences and the preferences voiced by others who are significant to him or between the opinions of two significant others. All SES groups experience difficulties with readiness for career decision making and lack of information but advantaged individuals from higher SES tend to make career decision making easier and with lesser difficulties. Resources available to higher SES groups however help to overcome the difficulties to some extent. As Greenbank (2007) stated that, the differences about work and occupational experience might be reinforced by exposure (or lack thereof) to opportunities, that require financial resources to gain access to, as well as having practical resources such as having a personal computer and a single room to retreat to. In addition to economic advantages, those in higher SES have parental and social resources, that facilitate easier career decision making processes. The family socioeconomic status (SES), including parents' own educational attainment and occupation affects access to information, that enables theirchildren's assess to present options and develop plans for the future. Mbagwu and Ajaegbu (2016) revealed that, students whose parents were from high educational background were more consistent and do not have much difficulties in making career choice, when compared with those whose parents have low educational background.

In addition, individuals from higher SES are also benefited from continued exposure to the social connections that parents have with others outside the family group, such as neighbors, school personnel, or work colleagues. For example, youths with well-connected parents and teachers tend to have choices in selecting career but if an individual's relatives are unemployed and their teachers lack job contacts, their choices are restricted to other kinds of contacts (such as peers) that do not lead to long-term benefits. These enhance the career decision making capacity of individuals from higher SES thereby reduces their career decision making difficulties. On the other hand, lower SES students are also purported to be more likely than others to experience alienation from higher education communities, to lack confidence in their abilities and to have difficulty in seeing the relevance of their study to future career opportunities. Research shows that students of

low SES are engaged in less deliberate career development activities, receive less guidance in school and from home regarding career (Blustein et al., 2002). Consistent with the present study, Thompson and Subich (2006) also revealed that, students who reported greater economic resources, social power, and social prestige also reported greater confidence in their abilities to complete career decision-making tasks and are more certain and comfortable with their career decision. In addition, Arulmani (2003) also indicated that, different SES groups face different career decision making difficulties wherein the most significant difficulty seems to be associated with the absence of clear and consistent information and uncertainty in skills to make careers related commitments. Thus, the combined effects of having less financial resources coupled with lesser consistent career guidance from the less educated as well as lower occupational cater parents and lesser social connections of the emerging adults with lower SES might have contributed to the present study result that showed the influence of SES on career decision making difficulty wherein individuals from lower SES significantly had more career decision making difficulties.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that socioeconomic status (SES) negatively effects the career decision making of undergraduate emerging adults such that individuals from lower SES have more difficulties in terms of lack of readiness, lack of information, inconsistent information and overall career decision making difficulties. Since, the demand for education and training has increased relentlessly over the past decades and the career decision making process have become more complex as emerging adults explores variety of possible life directions, there is an increased need for proper guidance. This calls for the importance of counselors to assist students in their career development and decision making processes. And, also a need for the professionals and teachers who are in contact with the students every day, to be more vigilant and attentive in guiding the students, particularly those from lower SES so that, they can make appropriate career decisions with ease, despite their vulnerability.

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APPENDICES

Table 1: Association and Correlation between Socio Economic Status and Categories of Career Decision Making Difficulty

Socioeconomic Status	Negligible	Moderate	Salient	Total	χ^2	R
Lack of Readiness						
Lower middle	8(4.4)	124(68.9)	48(26.7)	180(100)	4.04	-0.08*
Upper middle	15(4.6)	244(75.3)	65(20.1)	324(100)		
High	11(6.6)	119(71.7)	36(21.7)	166(100)		
Lack of Information						
Lower middle	40(22.2)	97(53.9)	43(23.9)	180(100)	16.56**	-0.17**
Upper middle	97(29.9)	176(54.3)	51(15.7)	324(100)		
High	66(39.8)	78(47.0)	22(13.3)	166(100)		
Inconsistent Information						
Lower middle	35(19.4)	105(58.3)	40(22.2)	180(100)	20.97***	-0.16**
Upper middle	90(27.8)	180(55.6)	54(16.7)	324(100)		
High	68(41.0)	75(45.2)	23(13.9)	166(100)		
Total Career Decision Making Difficulty						
Lower middle	27(15.0)	113(62.8)	40(22.2)	180(100)	16.43**	-0.17**
Upper middle	62(19.1)	219(67.6)	439(3.3)	324(100)		
High	47(28.3)	98(59.0)	21(12.7)	166(100)		

Figure in the Parenthesis Indicates Percentage.* Significant At 0.05 Level, **Significant At 0.01 Level, *** Significant At 0.001 Level.

Table 2: Comparison of Mean Scores of Categories of Career Decision Making by Levels of Socio Economic Status

	Lower Middle SES	Upper Middle SES	High SES	F Test
Lack of readiness	5.45(1.3)	5.36(1.3)	5.11(1.4)	2.78
Lack of information	4.98a(1.9)	4.49b(1.9)	3.99c(1.9)	10.92**
Inconsistent information	4.98a(1.9)	4.49b(1.9)	3.99c(1.9)	9.65**
Total career decision making difficulty	5.50a(1.5)	4.76b(1.4)	4.33c(1.6)	10.78**

Significant At 0.01 Level, Mean Value with Different Indices Differ Significantly (*Post-Hoc* Duncan)

